

FACTSHEET

Plant Protection & Quarantine

United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

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Why Are You Taking My . . . ?

If you've had food or souvenirs taken away by an inspector of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) while entering the United States at an airport, border station, or seaport, we want to be sure you understand why.

USDA restricts certain items brought into the United States from foreign countries. Prohibited items can harbor foreign animal and plant pests and diseases that could seriously damage America's crops, livestock, pets, and the environment.

Because of this threat, you are required to declare on a U.S. Customs form any meats, fruits, vegetables, plants, animals, and plant and animal products in your possession. This declaration must cover all items carried in your baggage and hand luggage. You will also be asked to indicate whether you have visited a farm or ranch outside the United States. Officers of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) inspect passenger baggage for undeclared agricultural products. At some ports, APHIS personnel use beagle dogs to sniff out hidden items. APHIS inspectors also use low-energy x-ray machines adapted to reveal concealed fruits and meats. Travelers who fail to declare a prohibited item can be fined up to \$250 on the spot and have their items confiscated.

Travelers are often surprised to hear that a single piece of fruit or meat can cause serious damage. In fact, one pest-infested or disease-infected item carelessly discarded can wreak havoc on American crops and livestock. And the extra cost for controlling agricultural pests and diseases ripples down from farmers to consumers in the form of higher food prices. Taking prohibited agricultural items from travelers helps ensure against outbreaks that could affect everyone.

Fresh Fruit

It may look luscious and wholesome, but fruit you bring into the United States from abroad could carry agricultural pests and diseases. Oranges, for example, could harbor the Mediterranean fruit fly (Medfly)—a devastating pest of more than 200 fruits, nuts, and vegetables. In fact, it's possible that individual travelers carried in the infested fruit that brought the Medfly to California in 1979 and to Florida in 1997. Medfly infestations can cause billion-dollar losses to the citrus industry.

USDA regulations regarding the importation of fresh fruit can be found in Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 319.56.

Meat and Meat Products

Regulations prohibit you from bringing in fresh, dried, and canned meats and meat products from most foreign countries. If any meat is used in preparing a product, it is prohibited. Commercially canned meat is allowed if the inspector can determine from the label that the meat was cooked in the can after it was sealed to make it shelf-stable without refrigeration. Animal disease organisms can live for months in sausage and other meat, including many types of canned hams sold abroad. Foot-and-mouth disease and African swine fever are just two of several dreaded foreign livestock diseases that could cost the U.S. livestock industry billions to eradicate, cause higher food prices, and eliminate export markets.

USDA regulations regarding the importation of meat and meat products can be found in Title 9 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 94.

Plants in Soil

Some of the most notorious and varied pest hitchhikers are microscopic insects, disease agents, and weed seeds that lurk in soil and plant parts. These organisms could cause extensive harm to our crops and forests.

You can import many plants legally and safely, provided you follow USDA guidelines and buy plants from reputable dealers. For information and permit applications, write USDA, APHIS, Plant Protection and Quarantine, 4700 River Road, Unit 136, Riverdale, MD, 20737–1236, Attn.: Permit Unit.

USDA regulations regarding the importation of plants in soil can be found in Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 319.37.

Exotic Birds

Sometimes without even showing signs of illness, parrots, parakeets, and other birds brought to the United States from other countries can carry and spread serious diseases, such as exotic Newcastle disease. Therefore, birds are subject to specific rules. Restrictions include a minimum 30-day quarantine stay in a USDA-operated import facility, which requires advance reservations and related fees. Birds must also be tested for exotic diseases while in quarantine.

To avoid confiscation of pet birds, know current restrictions and guidelines. For information, contact USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services, 4700 River Road, Unit 39, Riverdale, MD, 20737–1231, Attn.: National Center for Import/Export.

USDA regulations regarding the importation of pet birds can be found in Title 9 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 92.

Hunting Trophies

The entry of hunting trophies into the United States—as well as game animal carcasses, hides, dairy products, and other animal products and byproducts—is prohibited or severely restricted. These articles can also harbor livestock disease organisms. When the product involves endangered species, restrictions of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service also apply. For information, contact U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Management Authority, 4401 North Fairfax Dr., Arlington, VA 22203.

USDA regulations regarding the importation of hunting trophies can be found in Title 9 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 95.

Packing Material

Insects and even diseases can hide in packing material made from agricultural products like straw and burlap. Straw from wheat, if infected with an exotic wheat smut, for example, could do billions of dollars' worth of damage to American wheat fields. Straw hats or other decorative items made from straw may be forbidden entry into the United States if derived from prohibited material.

You may be surprised to hear that some agricultural pests can live on packing material for

long stretches of time without any source of food. One such pest is the khapra beetle, a tiny, brownish-black pest of grain. It can hide in the folds of burlap and can survive there, without feeding, for up to 3 years. But when the beetle reaches a supply of grain, it goes on a rampage. A colony reproduces so fast and eats so much that an infested grain bin literally comes alive with wriggling larvae. A khapra beetle infestation in the United States and Mexico in the 1950's cost about \$11 million to eradicate.

USDA regulations regarding the importation of packing materials can be found in Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 319.69.

Live Snails

No live snails may be brought into the mainland United States without a permit obtained from USDA. In 1966, a small boy brought two giant African snails into Florida from Hawaii. He eventually discarded them, and shortly thereafter these voracious consumers of foliage and fruit were infesting a 16-block area near his home. It took years and half a million dollars to eradicate them.

To request an application and permit information, write USDA, APHIS, PPQ, 4700 River Road, Unit 133, Riverdale, MD 20737–2346, Attn.: Permit Unit.

USDA regulations regarding the importation of live snails can be found in Title 7 of the Code of Federal Regulations, Part 330.200.

Do Your Part

Please do your part to help protect American agriculture and ensure that we continue to enjoy a healthy and abundant food supply. If you have questions about APHIS' inspection procedures or the enterability of particular agricultural products, call for help. Look in the phone book under "U.S. Department of Agriculture" for APHIS' nearest Plant Protection and Quarantine office, or call the central office at (301) 734–8645. In addition, the agency's home page on the Internet provides up-to-date information on these and other topics (<http://www.aphis.usda.gov>).